

Environmental Coordinating Committee

This charter is intended to promote a common understanding of the committee's purpose, scope, goal, structure and operating guidelines.

Background and Purpose

In 1999, a convergence of several factors related to the environment created the impetus to establish a forum for cross-organization collaboration and coordination of environmental issues. These factors included greater public awareness of environmental issues, more frequent need for cross-organizational environmental programs, initiatives, and strategies, and an increase in complex cross-organizational environmental regulations. The Deputy County Executive and the County's Environmental Coordinator formed the Environmental Coordinating Committee (ECC), which met for the first time on September 7, 1999. Cross-organization coordination and collaboration continues to be the primary purpose of this committee. The organizations represented on the committee comprise a system of interconnected entities, each of which benefits from the opportunity for communication and collaboration around issues related to the environment.

Committee members act as advisors to and a "sounding board" for each other about environmental issues, strategies and initiatives. Members learn from each other as they discuss a myriad of issues related to the environment and their roles in protecting, enhancing or managing it. Additionally, the committee provides a forum to discuss proposed policies related to the environment. Recommendations on environmental policy and practice developed by the committee are presented to the appropriate parties (i.e., the County Executive and/or the Board of Supervisors Environmental Committee). Recognizing that federal and state environmental legislation affects County environmental policies, the ECC keeps abreast of the status of legislation and provides advice and guidance as to any application in Fairfax County.

Scope

The ECC is constituted outside of the formal organizational structures for addressing environmental issues and is therefore advisory in nature. The committee is not intended to supplant or supercede any specific organization's roles and responsibilities with respect to the environment. While the ECC is not intended to be involved in the operation of organizations, members are encouraged to seek the opportunity for obtaining a broader perspective on operational issues by soliciting input from the committee.

The scope of environmental issues addressed by the committee is broad, including, but not limited to: air quality, animals, drainage, hazardous materials, noise, plants, resource management, sanitary and storm sewers, soil, stream valleys, trees, waste management, watersheds and water quality. The breadth of the committee's membership enables discussion of environmental issues that is both rich and comprehensive in perspective.

The committee focuses on near-term environmental issues that are significant in importance and may be urgent in nature. Additionally, the committee assures group time for addressing, in a more strategic manner, longer-term issues and initiatives associated with the environment. The ECC recognizes its role in supporting the Vision Elements of Fairfax County's Vision To Performance. Toward the element of practicing environmental stewardship, ECC members work together in planning wise use of resources and protecting and enhancing the natural environment and open space.

The ECC sponsors crosscutting initiatives that seek to integrate environmental awareness and understanding. As an example, the development of an Environmental Management System facilitates communication among County agencies as they work together toward cleaner air, water, and soil, longer resource life through reduced usage and progress toward a sustainable culture.

The committee meets jointly with the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) to discuss environmental issues and initiatives and follow-up on the implementation of ECC coordinated responses to the Council's Annual Report on the Environment.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of this committee is to create ongoing opportunities for collaboration and coordination among member organizations as they seek to protect, enhance and manage the environment and natural resources.

To achieve this goal, the objectives of the committee are:

- ❑ to exchange information and expertise in order to enhance both coordination among organizational entities and overall response to environmental issues.
- ❑ to collaborate on the development of recommendations in order to improve environmental policies and practices.
- ❑ to strengthen inter-organizational communication by promoting dialogue about environmental issues that might otherwise be limited by organizational boundaries.
- ❑ and to develop, among all members, a baseline level of understanding about many diverse environmental issues as well as knowledge of the various organizational roles and responsibilities for protecting and managing the environment.

Membership

Membership of this committee includes the Deputy County Executive, the Environmental Coordinator and representatives from the following organizations:

- ❑ County Attorney's Office
- ❑ County Executive's Office
- ❑ Fairfax County Water Authority
- ❑ Fire and Rescue Department
- ❑ Health Department
- ❑ Housing and Community Development Department
- ❑ Management and Budget Department
- ❑ Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District
- ❑ Park Authority
- ❑ Planning and Zoning Department
- ❑ Police Department
- ❑ Public Affairs Office
- ❑ Public Works and Environmental Services Department
- ❑ Transportation Department
- ❑ Vehicle Services Department
- ❑ and other organizational entities as identified by the group for membership

Representatives include the top executive of these organizational entities and his/her designee(s). A designee member has authority to speak for the organization she or he represents, including authority to participate in the development of committee recommendations. Other staff may attend committee meetings as the needs of planned agenda items dictate. When appropriate, representatives from other organizations may be invited as guests to attend committee meetings or activities.

Structure and Roles

Activities of the ECC may include, but are not limited to, full group meetings, subgroup meetings and joint meetings with EQAC and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) Environmental Committee. Full group meetings are typically held once a month on a Monday that the BOS does not meet. Subgroups may be formed by the ECC at any time to work on matters that align with the objectives of the committee as delineated in this charter. The ECC meets jointly with EQAC at a frequency agreed to by the two groups. Meetings with the BOS Environmental Committee are held on an as needed basis. Committee members are expected to attend full group meetings and joint meetings with EQAC and the BOS Environmental Committee as well as to be contributing members if assigned to work on any subgroups.

The Environmental Coordinator schedules full group meetings and provides a yearly schedule to members at the end of each calendar year. The ECC meeting schedule is planned to ensure time for addressing both near-term and longer-term environmental issues.

With input from committee members, the Environmental Coordinator develops an agenda in advance of full group meetings. A selective process is used in building and prioritizing agenda items for near-term issues to assure efficient use of meeting time. In proposing agenda items to the Environmental Coordinator, members are asked to be selective and to categorize items into one of the following three categories. An item that:

- ❑ simply needs to be shared for informational purposes
- ❑ needs to be discussed to enhance cross-system coordination
- ❑ requires committee action or a committee recommendation

The Environmental Coordinator prioritizes proposed agenda items to determine which items to include on a draft agenda that is forwarded to the Deputy County Executive for review and concurrence. As part of the agenda setting process, an effort is made to synchronize, to the extent possible, planned discussions with activities of the EQAC and the BOS Environmental Committee.

Meeting time for addressing longer-term environmental issues is structured using a different process. In a full group meeting, held each fall, the committee identifies and prioritizes longer-term environmental issues in order to develop a work plan that is executed over the next calendar year. These longer-term issues may be addressed as the sole discussion item in a full group meeting, in combination with near-term issues in a full group meeting, by a subgroup tasked to study the issue and report back to the full group, or some combination of these options.

The Deputy County Executive convenes full group meetings and, if unable to attend a meeting, designates a substitute to convene that meeting. To facilitate open dialogue between members, each meeting begins with a brief update by any members who choose to share related information outside the planned agenda items. The time dedicated to this segment of the meeting is monitored to assure adequate time to cover other agenda items.

While operating as a full committee, an agreed upon set of norms or guidelines for ECC member interaction applies. In following these guidelines, members:

- ❑ Recognize each other as equal participants and contributors to the committee process.
- ❑ Demonstrate mutual respect for each other.
- ❑ Consider themselves and the organizations they represent as parts of a larger, integrated whole.

Where possible, ECC members attempt to achieve consensus on decisions or recommendations made by the group. For the purpose of this charter, consensus is defined as active participation and agreement of all members so that a decision or recommendation is acceptable enough that each member can support it. Where time or the nature of the decision precludes building consensus, decisions are made either

by an individual or by majority vote, whichever is most appropriate. In instances where dissenting members of a majority vote wish to express their opinion, they have an opportunity to express that opinion verbally and/or in writing for the committee record. Committee members are expected to consult with those in their respective organizations to assure understanding and acceptance of agreements reached by the committee.

The Environmental Coordinator tracks proposed recommendations and tasks generated at full group meetings, communicating highlights to committee members as needed.

Subgroups are intended to be task-focused, with members working on crosscutting environmental issues, which are either near-term or longer-term in nature. The composition and membership of a subgroup is outlined in a charter that is expressly approved by the ECC. In chartering subgroups, the committee first assesses the desired outcome of an effort in order to assure it is both achievable and a priority. Additionally, the committee assures that the scope of the subgroup task is clearly defined and that any resource issues limiting a member organization's involvement with the effort are considered.

Committee members tasked by the full group to work as part of a subgroup determine the frequency, timing and nature of communication needed to accomplish the task. To ensure accountability to the full committee, subgroups regularly report on the progress or status of their task and, at the conclusion of the task, bring results or recommendations forward to the full committee for discussion.

Members may, from time to time, choose to communicate with each other electronically via an email distribution list developed specifically for this purpose. Such communication is more likely to occur between meetings, when coordination or collaboration around a specific environmental issue cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting. Members may communicate directly using this resource or solicit assistance from the Environmental Coordinator in framing or providing context to the issue.